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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern, and further actions and initiatives; priority theme: "The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges"

Statement submitted by International Alliance of Women, International Council of Women and Women's Environment and Development Organization, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement

Introduction

Urgent action is needed to mainstream gender equality and rural women's empowerment into climate change policies and programmes. No action would be more strategic to accelerate action on and ensure the effective implementation of those policies and programmes. Among the international instruments that can play a powerful role in this endeavour is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Although article 14 is specifically about rural women, all articles are relevant. The provisions of this convention related to gender equality and climate change are presented here.

Ratified by 187 countries (2011), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women is often described as an international bill of rights for women. The Convention protects women from discrimination and all forms of political, social, cultural and economic inequality based on gender. It is the only human rights treaty that affirms the reproductive rights of women.

In a statement issued at its forty-fourth session the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women noted that gender equality is essential to the successful implementation, monitoring and evaluation of climate change policies. Therefore, women's human rights should be included as an overarching guiding principle in the climate change treaty. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women affects the legal interpretation of treaty articles and it provides a moral compass for their practical application. It is also an important tool to plan for gender and women's empowerment in the Rio+20 process.

Article 2

Women's invisibility in national statistics constitutes a violation of the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, as lack of information affects a Government's ability to prevent discrimination. Examples are found in sectors such as forestry, energy, transport, construction and infrastructure, which typically do not collect gender-disaggregated data. Yet preliminary research indicates that when gender-blind policies in these sectors persist, women's contributions are undervalued and technological innovations fail to reach women.

Financial mechanisms associated with climate change, such as the Adaptation Fund, the Clean Development Mechanism, Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) and the future Green Climate Fund, should be monitored and gender should be mainstreamed into their policies. This would comply with article 2 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which obliges States Parties to embody the principle of the equality of men and women to ensure that public authorities and institutions, organizations or enterprises take action to remedy discrimination against women.

The Convention further addresses root causes. As discrimination is embedded in wider social inequalities, States Parties must take necessary steps to combat prejudices and customary practices based on stereotyped roles. One stereotype that is typically projected among scientists is that rural and indigenous women do not offer scientific knowledge, even though in many communities they often maintain

and promote biodiversity and are experts in medicinal plants. Other traditional knowledge can include management of forests, water conservation and food storage.

Articles 7 and 8

States Parties must ensure women have equal decision-making power at all levels, including in international processes such as the climate change treaty negotiations (arts. 7 and 8). However, only 14 per cent of heads of delegation at the sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Cancun (2010) were women. There is reason to be concerned, as women are poorly represented in bodies that will implement the treaty at the national and the local levels, notably technical advisory bodies, parliaments/congresses, business councils and courts.

One hopeful sign is that several of the national adaptation programmes for action reference gender. In these plans, it is important to emphasize women's right to equal decision-making in public life, including the design of national adaptation programmes for action and medium-to-long-term national adaptation plans. Policymakers have yet to tap the potential of international women's movements. The "win-win" scenario is one that creates synergy between women's empowerment and mitigation and adaptation policies.

Article 14

Article 14 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women further strengthens provisions for rural women, including pastoralists, nomads, and hunters and gatherers, in diverse occupations (e.g., fishing, wage labour and Swidden agriculture). Recognizing the diversity of rural women is critical in rural communities experiencing food insecurity and environmental devastation. Of particular concern is the feminization of agriculture and the rise in numbers of older women and female heads of households due to the out-migration of men. In many communities, women must add work in fields and animal husbandry to existing responsibilities for cooking and for gathering wood and water.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations *State of Food and Agriculture 2010-2011: women in agriculture; closing the gender gap* states that because women in rural areas have less access to productive resources and opportunities than men, there is a productivity gap, causing women farmers to produce less than men farmers. If the gender gap closes between women and men, productivity yields will increase on the women's farms by 20-30 per cent, potentially reducing the number of hungry people in the world by 12-17 per cent.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women notes that rural women should be empowered to manage the environment through equal access to productive resources. Article 14 guarantees rural women equal access to water and sanitation, agricultural credit and loans, and appropriate technology. One strategic use of credit would be to use clean-energy-burning stoves. However, this must happen rapidly and on a massive scale because black carbon produced by biofuel stoves is not only detrimental to women's health, but also a main contributor to global warming. If poor women are to change cooking technologies, they must be given better access to financing options, such as microcredit, rental and collective schemes.

Safety nets and insurance for social protection are considered essential to national adaptation plans as part of poverty reduction strategies (report by Working Group II of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2007) and improving the ability of women to cope with ecological stresses strengthens the entire family's adaptive resilience. However, rural and indigenous women rarely have access to adequate health-care facilities and social security. And while the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women recognizes that rural women have the right to adequate standards of living, housing and communication, these are seldom considered in climate change discussions.

Articles 11.1, 13 and 15.1

The climate change crisis potentially opens new financing, business and employment opportunities for women living in cities as well as in the countryside. The climate change treaty will set new directions for carbon trading markets and businesses for green technologies. In developing countries, renewable energy technologies promise to create more income-generating projects, such as making lamps and repairing devices using solar voltaic cells.

Diversification of income sources can help cushion the negative impact of climate change on agricultural livelihoods. The question is: will rural women benefit equally from these entrepreneurial opportunities? Articles 11.1, 13 and 15.1 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women hold States Parties responsible for guaranteeing that women will have equal economic and employment rights. Governments should also promote childcare facilities to enable parents to combine family obligations with work responsibilities.

Article 15.1 affords women the same legal capacity as men to conclude contracts and administer property and mortgages, and in all other areas of economic life. Women employed in sectors that are traditionally male-biased must be afforded equal remuneration, including benefits, and granted equal treatment in the value of their work. They also need to be better represented in management and social audits of wage employment schemes.

Article 12.1

Women's rights to health are found in article 12 of the Convention and in General Recommendation 24 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which recognize the importance of gender equality to the quality of family life and the need for Governments to improve health statistics, as well as to allocate adequate resources for women's health care throughout their life cycle. The Committee has noted that women's health status and ability to access health services, including family planning, are intricately linked to gender-specific roles.

Some research indicates that women are disproportionally affected by natural disasters such as drought, floods and heat waves. For example, according to the World Health Organization, adverse reproductive outcomes follow disasters, including early pregnancy loss, premature delivery, stillbirths, delivery-related complications and infertility. In a 1991 cyclone in Bangladesh, many women perished with their children at home as they had to wait for their husbands to return and make an evacuation decision (Lorena Aguilar, "Is there a connection between gender and climate change?").

Climate change will further burden poor women through increases in malnutrition, floods, storms and fires, increased diarrhoeal disease and changes in the distribution of some infectious disease vectors. The whole family suffers if women die or cannot carry out caregiving roles.

Article 10

Rural women's access, use and control over science and technology, including formal and informal education and training, are vital to a community's ability to mitigate and adapt to climate change. Gender equality in education is guaranteed by article 10 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which identifies the need for women's equal access to technical and professional education. The Convention also identifies the need for equal remuneration for women and social services to enable them to combine family responsibilities with work.

Article 10 reiterates that educational information to help improve the health and well-being of families, including information and advice on family planning, is a woman's right.